

# Learning To Fly

## The JRCS Teaching and Learning Magazine—Issue 2, September 2015

### Welcome, from the editorial team!

**Welcome** to the second edition of Learning to Fly, the JRCS teaching and learning magazine. Following some wonderful results for our students in the 2015 GCSE and A Level exams, we return back to school more focused than ever on making sure that developing our teaching practice is our top priority for this academic year.

Inside this edition of Learning to Fly there are articles bringing you up to date with developments in teaching and learning from across the school. We welcome several new contributors, including an introductory article by Sid, 8H, who will be leading the student teaching and learning action team.

This year our top priorities in terms of classroom practice are:

- Supporting our disadvantaged students
- Challenging the most able
- Tackling low level disruption
- Promoting good presentation, literacy and numeracy across the curriculum

With that in mind this edition of Learning to Fly includes articles on several of these topics.



The magazine also includes contributions from several members of the Teaching and Learning Group—our voluntary after-school meeting where staff can come and listen to colleagues share new ideas and good practice. All colleagues are welcome to attend the meetings; the dates of this term's meetings are Thursday 17th September and Thursday 5th November, we hope to see you there!

### Contents:

1. Welcome from the editorial team
2. 2014-15 student voice feedback
3. Disadvantaged students
4. From the Teaching and Learning Group—1
5. Introducing the student T&L Action Team
6. Literacy
7. Right to Write
8. Lexia
9. Lexia (continued)
10. From the T&L Team—2
11. From the T&L Team – 2 (continued)
12. Aspiration Cohort



# Student voice feedback 2014-15

Over the course of the last academic year over 100 students from all year groups took part in student voice activities. These activities tended to involve students sitting with staff and, using their books as prompts, discussing the things they feel best support their learning. Individual teachers and departments have received feedback from the discussions, but below is a summary of the common themes and points made by our students last year.

## Stretch and Challenge

At KS3 some of the more able students identified a lack of challenge in some subjects. In Y7 some students said that they found themselves repeating some topics that they felt they had mastered in primary school. Students said they felt most challenged when lessons were pitched at a high level so the work was difficult from the start. They also said that they wanted extension activities to be harder versions of what they were working on that lesson, rather than a different topic or more of the same work. "It's hard, I have to think. I can't just come to a decision I have to really work it out" - Clare, Y8

## Teacher Explanations

When identifying the features of the lessons in which they learned the most, students regularly talked about the quality of explanation as being key. Students said that they enormously preferred it when teachers did not interrupt their explanation to answer questions or deal with behaviour. Being able to follow teacher exposition from start to finish was something students felt strongly about. They also said that teachers who then went round the class to check that everyone had understood really helped support learning. "Sir goes over it until we understand" - Lauren, Y11.

## Marking

Unsurprisingly, students said that regular feedback was very important to them. Students were very aware of which teachers regularly marked their books and they were confident in talking about how

that helped them to improve. Students were also well informed about the kind of feedback they liked to receive. Students were very positive about task marking but several of them made the point that sufficient time needs to be given to complete the tasks in lessons. Having the opportunity to draft and re-write work was something that students also liked. "Sir circles the things that need to be worked on and writes a task in line with that" - Jack Y8.

## Behaviour

Students in KS4 and KS5 were very positive about behaviour, with very few students identifying any lessons where they thought behaviour impeded learning. At KS3 some students did say that the behaviour of a few individual students could sometimes disrupt the learning of others. Students felt that behaviour management was supported by:

- Consistency—students knowing that certain actions will result in certain sanctions and that the sanctions will be applied fairly
- Seating plans—a surprising number of students identified students moving seats and not sitting in the seating plan as a cause of disruption
- Humour and relationships—students felt that building good relationships and being calm and good humoured fostered a positive learning environment
- Not punishing the whole class—better behaved students said that they did not feel that stopping the whole class working to address behaviour when not all students had been misbehaving was a good thing

## Conclusions

What stood out from the interviews was how positive students were about lessons at JRCS, and how many examples of great teaching and thoughtful care they could identify. Keep up the good work everyone!



# What can we do to support our disadvantaged students?

Sean Christie

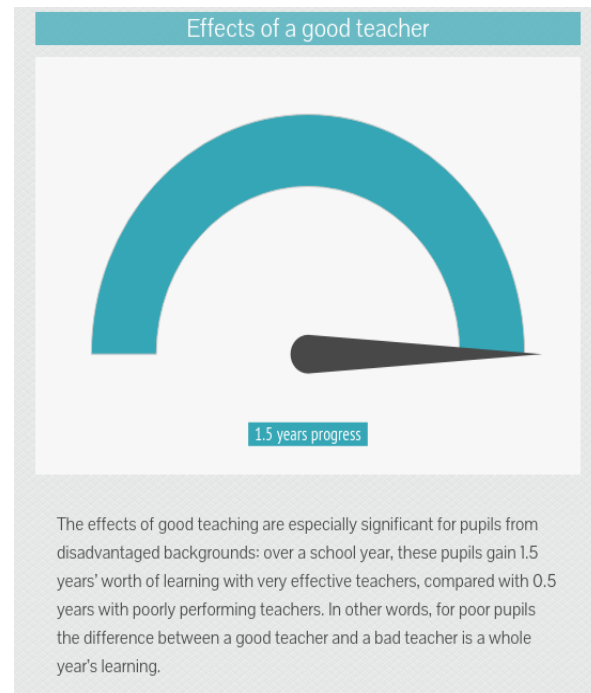
As a school we continue to work to break the link between educational opportunities and family background, and to create a system in which young people are given the chance to prosper, regardless of their family background or neighbourhood. Low social mobility and lack of educational opportunity is arguably the biggest social challenge of our times: the income gap between the richest and poorest in society continues to widen, while education opportunities remain overwhelmingly dominated by children from the most privileged homes.

Nationally, the gap in attainment is between disadvantaged children and their more fortunate peers is far too big. Two thirds of pupils eligible for free school meals do not achieve five good GCSEs compared with around a third of other children.

Admittedly, some progress has been made over the years. In the past decade, the proportion of children eligible for free school meals achieving five good GCSEs has almost doubled. Ten years ago, London had some of the worst state schools in the country. Today it has among the best. Our capital city's poor children do 50 per cent better than their peers elsewhere. Small wonder that almost half of the disadvantaged children who go on to university are from London.

A report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty (SMCP) commission found that if every school in England improved the performance of pupils from poor backgrounds so they were half as good as those achieved by the best performing schools, 60,000 more children would have gained five good GCSE passes, including English and maths, last year. (2014)

The commission used the national pupil database to compare schools with similar levels of disadvantage. It then used modelling to discover the effects of schools closing half the gap with the top 20% of schools with similar concentrations of disadvantage. The results



showed that at least 14,000 more disadvantaged students each year would pass five good GCSEs including English and maths – a 25% increase. We have to ensure that as a school and as teachers we deliver the best possible education to our students that we can.

Some of the most successful strategies in closing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students include;

- The provision of good feedback to students and staff who monitor their work systematically,
- Peer tutoring,
- The provision of educational trips and out-of-school studying opportunities,
- Encourage reading for pleasure,

Supporting disadvantaged students in lessons is a top priority for JRCS this year. Disadvantaged students will be highlighted in green on all class lists. The definition of a disadvantaged child is one who has been eligible for free school meals any time in the past six years or is a looked-after child.



# From the Teaching and Learning Group—Part One

The Teaching and Learning Group is a voluntary meeting that takes place once every six weeks on a Thursday after school. The meetings start with refreshments and then staff share ideas, resources and new teaching strategies that they have been trying in their classrooms. The second part of the meeting tends to look at a more strategic teaching and learning item; over the past year this has included considering how numeracy can be embedded into curriculum areas and planning the school's first cross-curricular project, which we are hoping to launch in the Spring term. Meeting dates are on front page, come along!

Check out what we got up to last year:

## Silent Debates — Fiona Davies

Silent debates are a great way to encourage students to engage with each other's ideas, justify their own opinions and practise their literacy, all whilst being silent. The principle is that students respond in writing to propositions or statements. This can be set up in various different ways from having blank sheets around the room, different topics in different areas in the room or one table-sized sheet for all students to stand around. Students write their responses to prompt statements/questions on the sheets and move around the room responding to other prompts or to other students' responses. Students can be encouraged to draw links between responses and to challenge or disagree with others. The silence allows students to think deeply and also to get away from the sometimes personal elements in disagreement within

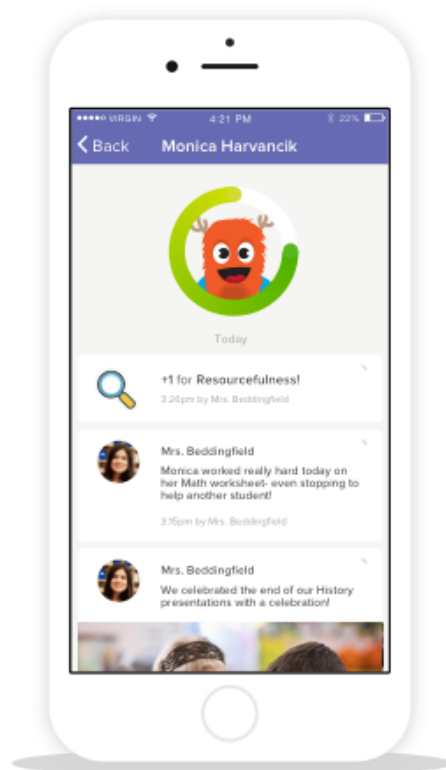
## Class Dojo—Charlene Thomas shared Class Dojo with the T&L Group. Janine Sumison has been trialling it with her classes:

What is Class Dojo? [www.classdojo.com](http://www.classdojo.com)

ClassDojo is a behaviour management tool for the classroom. Each student has a profile – complete with their own avatar – to which teachers can assign positive and negative points (or 'dojos') throughout the lesson. The programme can be operated by a teacher from their computer or tablet, and each time they award a point an (optional) sound plays to alert the class. This information is then recorded on students' profiles so that it can be reviewed throughout the year. Parents also have logins so that they can view their child's achievements from home.

What did Janine think?

I have been trialling Class Dojo with Y8 and Y9 set 4. It's been a great success. They really enjoy seeing their scores at the end of each lesson. The student with the highest positive score at the end of each week gets an LOC. Also you can personalise it and add your own categories to both positive and negative. The randomiser is really useful too. I haven't got as far as inviting parents yet but that will be the next step.





## Introducing the student Teaching and Learning Action Team!

"Hello, my name is Sid Summers. I am an enthusiastic student from year 8 who is seeking the opportunity to make a difference in my school and in the local community. I am passionate about teaching, learning and education as I strongly feel that education is such an important and vital part of life. From September 2015, I will be running the teaching and learning team. I decided to get involved in the team as currently, teaching is my ideal career after school and I want to be able to educate students just as well as the teachers in my school. I want to be able to make a difference in all departments in the school and give them a student's perspective on the current lessons, units and curriculums and how the other members of the class feel about them. In addition, I want to give the students in the teaching and learning team the chance to know and understand what they are learning and how they are being taught the national curriculum within all of the subjects. My main goal for the end of July 2016 is to have helped the departments in which students tend to misbehave, get them engaged, focused and interested in what they are learn



*Sid, 8H*

ing. Furthermore, I hope to bring the lessons to life, by suggesting new methods of teaching, and make students want to work harder in their time during secondary school, leading up to their GCSE's, A-Levels and University. Also, with the new GCSE's being set in place, it is crucial that the students are aware that the lessons that they are in are all preparing them for when they are in Year 11 and are in no way unnecessary or irrelevant to them. I am very eager and excited to be taking on this responsibility and I hope I will be able to not just make a little difference but to make a huge impact. Thank you so much for reading and I hope to have to be successful in achieving my goals along with my team. Thank you!"



# Literacy: The Power of Words

This term, students will be introduced to a new range of key words:

## Key words – September

Thus

Notably

Notion

Elucidates

Evokes

Ostensibly

Fundamental

Instils

Denotes

Nevertheless



Early this term students will do some work during tutor time on putting these words into sentences correctly. Please encourage students to use the key words in your subject area as much as possible, flagging them up on your classroom's literacy display board and rewarding them for their efforts by using the credit system.

Every half term students will be involved in a whole-school challenge to fit as many key words as they can into one single sentence - here's Mr Cocksworth's effort!

***Ostensibly, this denotes a fundamental notion of sadness, thus elucidating the apparent nature of the character: despite the character's true feelings, this nevertheless instils a notable sense of compassion in the reader and in turn evokes our sympathy.***

Other literacy developments this term include the continued embedding of purple pens and the literacy marking policy. Right to Write has been extended this year to involve all year groups at KS3. Students have voted for their favourite colour folders and will be completing Right to Write pieces in all subject areas across Y7-Y9.

The English department will be continuing to push students to read more widely for pleasure, and to have a go at more challenging texts. All KS3 students will receive a reading log to track their independent reading, which will be signed weekly by their English teachers. It would be great if all staff, particularly KS3 form tutors, can also get involved in conversations promoting books and wider reading for pleasure.



# Right to Write

The 2014-15 school year saw the pilot of the JRCS Right to Write project. Right to Write saw all Y7 students plan, draft and produce 'best' pieces of extended writing in all their subjects. These pieces of work were marked for literacy and final 'best' pieces of work were stored in presentation folders. Over the course of the year students produced approximately 4,000 more words of drafted and redrafted prose than Y7s have done in previous years. The pilot was designed not only to improve students' literacy but, also, to allow each subject to prepare students for the increased written demands of the new GCSEs.



*Students receiving certificates for excellent R2W essays*

## Student and staff feedback:

- Staff feedback agreed that the quality of writing in Y7 had increased significantly over the course of the year
- Students in Y7 have made, on average, far more progress in terms of their literacy than students nationally (see Lexia article). This cannot be attributed solely to R2W, but is the result of a combination of literacy interventions launched for Y7s last year
- Student voice was overwhelmingly positive about the project, these comments were typical of those we received:
  - \* *"We should do this every year"*
  - \* *"We learn loads more when we do Right to Write"*
  - \* *"It shows us what we can do and how much we can achieve"*

## What next?

The project will run again with our new Y7s and will be extended into Y8 and Y9. Y8s and Y9s have voted on their folder colours so each year group will have a different colour. Sam Cocksworth in English has been appointed the R2W coordinator and will work with Nina Eastman and the rest of the literacy team in supporting staff and students in successfully implementing the project.

## Some titles of this year's projects:

Describe and discuss how Constructivists used typography to communicate Bolshevik propaganda in 1919. *Art, Y9*

How are women represented in *Much Ado About Nothing*? *English, Y8*

Should schools ban social networks? *ICT, Y7*

Exploring the ethics of using stem cells in medicine. *Science, Y9*

How does Grieg create a dramatic atmosphere in his music? *Music, Y7*



# Y7 Lexia Pilot

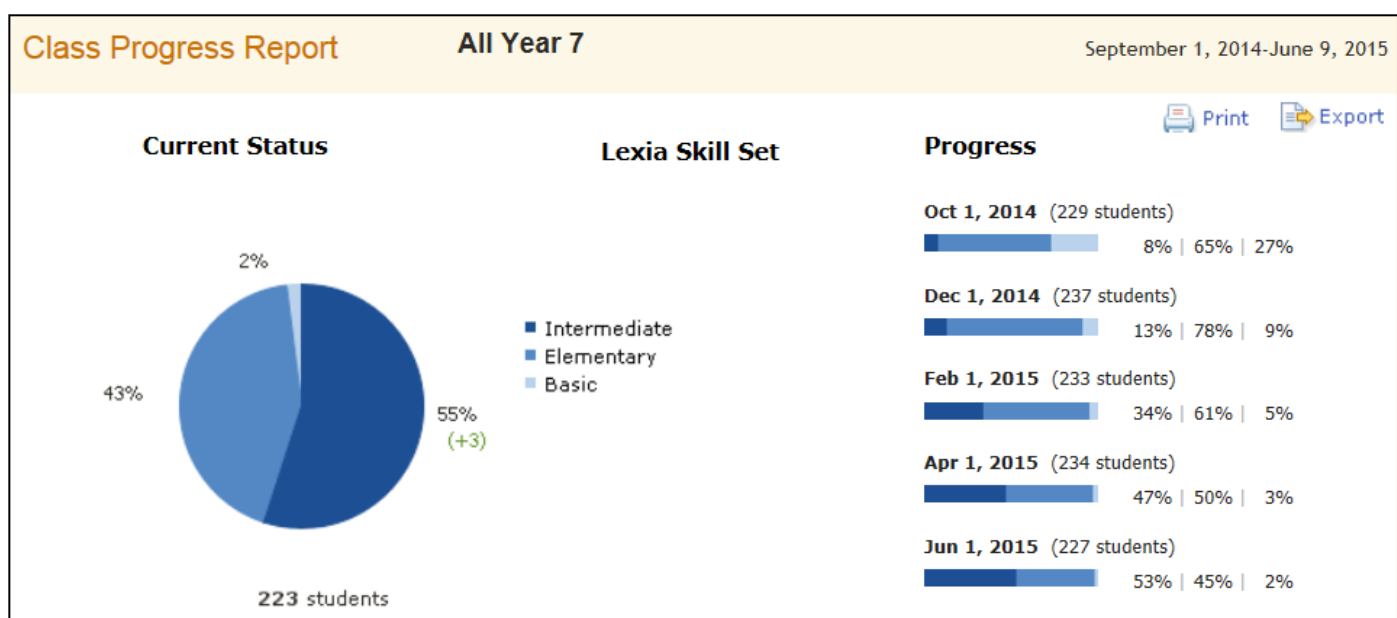
Lucy Hunnisett , Lexia Coordinator

This academic year we have seen the highly successful Lexia learning programme trialled at Jo Richardson. Lexia is a computer-based programme which helps to develop students' reading skills by getting them to complete short activities focusing on phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Introduced to the year 7s as an initiative to improve their literacy, reading and, ultimately, to help prepare them for the new GCSEs, the programme involves students spending at least one hour per week completing activities. They work their way up the five levels of the programme, each level becoming more difficult than the one before it. Students take a preliminary test before starting the programme and begin at a level matched to their ability, so not all students have to start at level 1.

Student data was monitored over a period of 9 months to determine whether Lexia had a significant impact on our students' literacy and reading levels. The results were extremely positive:

**Only 2% of students finished the academic year in the basics skill set compared to 27% in October.**

**We now have 53% of students in the intermediate skill set compared to 8% in October** (see chart below).



Data from Lexia showing the proportion of students in the basic, elementary and intermediate skill sets

*'Lexia gives us lots of opportunities to learn new literacy skills such as the origins of words, like the word "democratic", which I didn't know before. It has also helped me improve my grammar, which has helped me in all subjects. It has especially helped me with Right to Write, allowing me to get the highest level possible.'*

*-Logan Grain, 7G*

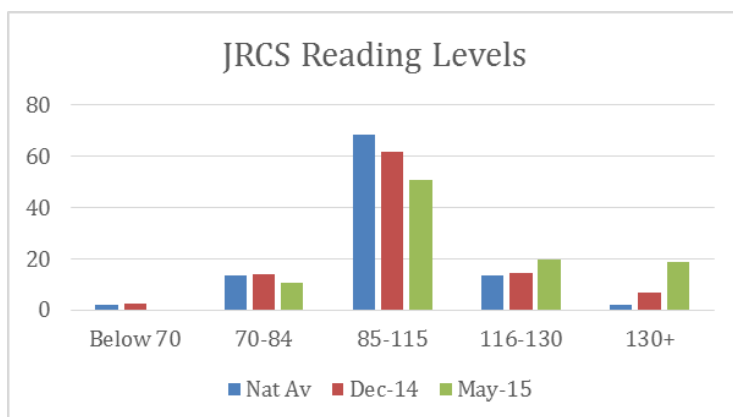


### Lexia Continued - Hodder Testing Outcomes

Students completed Hodder standardised reading tests at the start and end of year 7. This data allows us to compare our students' reading ability with students nationally:

- Of the students tested, **60% made better than average reading progress** (12 months or more) during the 9 month Lexia trial.
- Progress shown in terms of months gained in reading age over the past 9 months showed **some students making as much as 96 months progress in their reading age**
- Nationally, 2.27% student are classed as 'excellent readers'. Of the JRCS year 7 cohort, 7.1% were classed as 'excellent readers' in September, **by June this had increased to 16% in June, well above national average.**
- Lexia has had the **greatest impact** on those students who already had **good reading ability.**
- Whilst progress amongst low reading ability bands is not as significant as those in the more able bands, students have still made much more progress than would normally be expected, or than similar students make nationally. **Almost 50% of the students with SEN, for instance, have made greater than expected progress.**

These highly significant improvements in our students' reading levels cannot be solely attributed to Lexia. Other initiatives such as Right to Write, the increased focus on whole school literacy and the work of our English Department also help explain our success. Cathy Ellis (SDD Assessment Coordinator) who carried out much of the Hodder analysis and has provided support throughout the pilot believes these results so significant that they indicate Lexia has been a crucial factor in improving our students' literacy.



Building on the pilot's success, next academic year Lexia will, again, be completed by our new cohort of year 7s in AM and PM registration and some English lessons. It will also continue to be completed by targeted groups of year 8s that still have lower than average reading levels. Home usage will also be a focus, as data suggests that students make more progress more quickly the more the programme is used. Hopefully, with these improvements, the success of Lexia can be continued into next year.

*"Lexia has helped improve my spelling. When you get to the harder levels, you also learn about where different words come from, like Greek or Latin words, which I found interesting. I felt I learnt a lot."*

*– Callum Walker, 7H*



## From the Teaching and Learning Group:

### 'Active Learning in the Mixed Ability Classroom.'

*Seb Hayes, Teacher of History and Annette Lynch, Second in History*

**Active learning** is a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content.

Rarely is learning more rigorous, stimulating and engaging than when active learning techniques are employed effectively in the mixed ability classroom. Whilst the term 'active learning' encompasses a wide variety of pedagogical strategies to improve learning, this short article will focus on the benefits of role play and drama.

Although undoubtedly high risk, rigorous and well planned role play and drama activities have a number of significant benefits in the classroom. The following list is not exhaustive:

- Motivate learners to engage with lesson sequences;
- Clarify complex terms and concepts;
- Contextualise events;
- Aid factual recall;
- Develop chronological understanding;
- Develop an overview or identify the key features of a story, event or framework.

Follow up work will benefit from both the enthusiasm and the new perceptions arising from involvement. Four rules are therefore worth following to maximise the impact of these powerful activities.

- The vast majority of the class must be involved;
- The role play must be simple and performable with no rehearsal;
- The role play must not demand advanced reading skills;
- The role play must not be so protracted that it precludes time for immediate follow-up, such as debriefing or shared reflection (*Ian Luff, 'I've been in the Reichstag': rethinking roleplay.'* **Teaching History:** August 2002)

*The following activity below was heavily influenced by a session by Martin Spafford (School's History Project Fellow) at the Institute of Education.*

Students often encounter several abstract substantive concepts each day across a variety of different subjects, including: parliament, liberal, and pacifist to sight a few. Students can often regurgitate definitions but this is often a facade which belies a lack of genuine understanding. In order to develop a concrete understanding of both the difference between non-violent and violent protest and the significance of the non-violent approach to protest by African American's in the early American Civil Rights Movement concurrently, a short role play was used to recreate the events at Woolworth's Diner in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960.

These included: two police officers, three upper middle class white diners, a server, two waitresses, a roaming reporter and a camera man. Examples of the instructions they were given are below:



The class were given clear behavioural expectations, primarily to remain in their seats unless otherwise instructed and the specific roles were given to a number of students, all of which were carefully selected to ensure that the activity was both memorable and powerful. These included: two police officers, three upper middle class white diners, a server, two waitresses, a roaming reporter and a camera man. Examples of the instructions they were given are below:

You are a white middle class banker who supports the Jim Crow Laws and Segregation. You must intimidate the student protesters by shouting at them. 'Get off the white seats.' 'You have your own seats' You are not allowed to sit on these seats.' **Remain in your seats for until the students have refused to move from the lunch counter.**

You are a waitress. You must walk around the room asking the class what they would like to eat and drink. You should apologise for protest at the front.

You are a server at the lunch counter. You must refuse to serve the students and tell them to move seats.

The rest of the class were then told that they were sitting in the restaurant either eating or waiting to be served by a waitress and that they were enjoying the ambience and experience. They were told to carefully observe the events at the front of the classroom in order to identify the subtle differences between the versions of events. The teacher and a carefully selected student then entered the diner and proceeded to protest using a non-violent approach and a violent approach (conveyed verbally rather than physically!). The video of the activity is available to view in: **shared area/ staff curriculum/ active learning**. Students were then given thinking time to reflect on the two versions by answering the following questions in pairs and small groups:

**How were the students portrayed the first time?**  
**How were the students portrayed the second time?**  
**How were the white people portrayed? Was there a change between the two demonstrations?**  
**Why was the direct non-violent approach so important for Civil Rights protest groups?**  
**What was the significance of the media attention?**

After thinking time these questions were carefully targeted across the ability range, starting with lower ability students before finishing with VHPA students. The impact was encouraging and the quality of responses was high across all four groups with which the lesson was used, with learners of all abilities able to articulate the importance of the non-violent approach. What is perhaps more significant than the learning from this individual lesson is that the excitement and enthusiasm it generated was sustained throughout the remaining lessons in the sequence and a lengthy and complex assessment.

Thus, when carefully planned to include reflection time with differentiated scaffolding to focus the learning and when serious learning intentions are the heart of the teacher's rationale, role play and drama activities can have a profound impact on student learning with multiple learning styles addressed in one activity. Furthermore these activities generate the engagement necessary to sustain high quality written work and knowledge acquisition which are both necessary pre-requisites of success in many subjects in new GCSE syllabuses.



# Aspiration Cohort 2015-16

Anna Moody, VHPA Coordinator

This year the aspiration cohort will enter its third year and we hope to continue to see progress with these pupils both in terms of their expectations for themselves and their results. We will be revisiting our very successful parents' evening of 2013/14 with its focus on how parental involvement can raise pupil attainment substantially as well as adding a new parents evening for KS4 about how best to plan and execute useful revision strategies for the GCSE years.

Aspiration only assemblies will continue in the mornings with at least one meeting per half term per year. As always pupils will gain access to the cohort either through their prior attainment or through achieving highly on the behaviour, mindset and homework rankings.

The year 10 trip to Cambridge, year 9 maths master-classes at Queen Mary's University, the "Reach out to Health Sciences" and the Imperial College Art and Design days will all continue as well as any new trips we can find that are available and appropriate for our pupils.

One big addition (we hope) will be setting up and encouraging a debate club – please email me if you would like to participate in the teacher debates we would like to have at lunchtimes to get the pupils interested.

Ultimately, however, the most important thing for our pupils is the progress they make in lessons and we're hopeful that the action plans all departments have created to promote progress for students with VHPA will help with this. Anyone needing the generic challenge cards I showed at the assembly please find them under Staff/Curriculum/Challenge\_VHPA/General Worded questions. Any requests for help with time or resources in order to implement your action plans should be sent to Garry Smith. Remember that the Challenge programme will be in place where teachers can reward pupils by signing off their challenge cards rather than creating their own reward system. As always, one complete card will earn the pupil some sweets, an LOC and a reward trip.

*"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."* Winston Churchill

## **What is the Aspiration Cohort and what does VHPA mean?**

**VHPA stands for students with 'Very High Prior Attainment'. These are students that joined JRCS with a National Curriculum level 5 in English, maths, or both. They are coloured dark pink on registers so you might here them referred to as 'dark pink' or 'pink' students. Anna Moody works with these students, and some other very high achieving students to help them fulfil their potential. This group of students is known as the 'Aspiration Cohort'.**